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The Role of the Frontline Presidents

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The frontline presidents* have played an important role in the drive for majority rule in Rhodesia and have been instrumental in shaping the response of the Rhodesian nationalists toward a negotiated settlement. We can expect the presidents to exercise their influence over the Geneva conference even though they will not be present for the negotiations there. If the Geneva talks collapse, they will be thrust back into their role of guiding the effort to oust the white minority Smith regime through force of arms.

The frontline presidents are well aware that the Geneva conference represents their last chance to achieve a politically negotiated transition to black majority rule in Rhodesia. They are determined to keep disputes among the Rhodesian nationalists from threatening the success of the conference.

Having been involved in several abortive efforts over the years to unite the nationalists, the presidents know full well that nationalist disunity could disrupt the conference by allowing Ian Smith to play off the rival factions against one another as

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*Originally, Nyerere of Tanzania, Machel of Mozambique, Kaunda of Zambia, and Khama of Botswana, Angolan President Neto has recently been included but does not play a prominent role. The decision to include him in the group is based on deference to his nationalist credentials and the leading role he might play in any future similar joint approach to the Namibian problem.

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he has successfully done in the past.

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The presidents also want the conference to be fully representative of the nationalists' interests, so that no one can step forward later and challenge any agreement on the grounds that he was unjustifiably denied participation. It is for this reason that they urged the British to invite Ndabaningi Sithole to Geneva, even though Sithole's position in the nationalist movement has slipped to the point where he is on the brink of being removed as president of ZANU in favor of Robert Mugabe. Sithole's presence at Geneva, however, could well prove contentious.

The presidents--at least Kaunda, Nyerere, and Machel--will send "observers" to the conference although these "observers" will not participate directly in the proceedings. The presidents are anxious to see that the momentum toward settlement does not flag and the presence of their representatives will allow some compensation for the fact that they will lose direct contact with the nationalists while they are in . It is because of this loss of contact that the presidents are anxious for the British to take a firm hold on the negotiations. The presidents fear that without firm British guidance, Smith will make no concessions and the fragile unity among the nationalists will crumble.

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Their tactical consensus aside, the presidents have differing personal expectations regarding the outcome of the conference, ranging from the cautious optimism of Kaunda to the open pessimism of Machel. Moreover, they have their own "favorite sons" among the nationalists. Kaunda and Khama favor Nkomo while Machel and Nyerere lean toward Mugabe. The so-called "patriotic front" between Nkomo and Mugabe may be the result of an effort to paper over this split in the support of the presidents.

The presidents have encouraged the nationalists to take a hard line toward negotiations at Geneva, although it seems clear that the presidents and nationalists will consider compromising on a number of points, such as control of Rhodesia's defense and law and order portfolios, a cessation of guerrilla operations, and control of economic powers.

Moreover, it appears to be the frontline presidents, who have established the philosophical basis on which the nationalists will approach negotiations. Machel and Nyerere, both of whom were directly involved in the decolonization of Mozambique, refer to the transition to majority rule in Rhodesia in terms of the "Chissano formula", referring to Joaquim Chissano, who headed up the transitional government in Mozambique.

The presidents would be more precise if they spoke of the "Portuguese formula" rather than the "Chissano formula," because

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in essence they are speaking of the decolonizing formula used by the Portuguese both in Mozambique and Angola. In the case of Mozambique the formula worked fairly well because there was only one national movement, FRELIMO, and it was a cohesive organization. The formula did not work in Angola because of the presence of competing nationalist forces who refused to compromise and cooperate. Thus, the presidents, when they speak of the Chissano formula, undoubtedly have in the back of their minds the spectre of the Rhodesian transition becoming another Angola.

The basic point of the "Chissano formula" is that majority rule comes into being when the transitional period is established; it is not a stage of political development arrived at after a transitional period. Moreover, the formula assumes that a black political apparatus will inherit legitimacy from the departing sovereign, which in this case is the UK and not the Smith regime. With the encouragement of the frontline presidents, the nationalists will insist that the Chissano formula or something approximating it be implemented for Rhodesia.

Both Machel and Nyerere were previously determined that any black majority government in Rhodesia be more or less in the mold of their own "revolutionary, socialist" regimes. Machel in particular, from his own experience, believed that Rhodesia's black political leadership must grow out of the revolutionary struggle. Because of this, the two men rejected any negotiations.

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that might turn exclusively on such old-line nationalist leaders as Nkomo, Muzorewa, and Sithole, whom they have regarded as amenable to "imperialist" influences. .

Despite their commitment to revolutionary struggle and the level of their rigid opposition to negotiations with the Smith regime since the collapse of the Nkomo-Smith talks earlier this year, Machel and Nyerere apparently needed little convincing to make them accede to the Geneva negotiating effort.

What apparently changed their minds--over and above the US involvement--was the prospect of participation of "progressives" from the nationalist movement and growing economic and military pressures.

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Machel's willingness to go along with a renewed effort toward a negotiated settlement apparently springs from heavy economic and military pressures on his regime, which have also complicated his domestic position. The Mozambique economy, already in a state of stagnation, was set back even further by the closure last March of the border with Rhodesia. Indeed, the Mozambican economy was hit worse than the Rhodesian economy.

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Moreover, as the insurgency escalated in recent months, Machel committed an increasing number of troops to assist the guerrillas and to defend Mozambique's border against Rhodesian "hot pursuit" raids, resulting in heavy Mozambican casualties. The prospect of settlement came at a time when the economic and military burdens on Mozambique were becoming onerous and it gave Machel a politically safe way to back away from his militant position.

Neither the presidents nor the nationalists are likely to accept any settlement that includes political economic guarantees that leave white Rhodesians with an important measure of authority. They would, however, support "paper" political guarantees. Kaunda and Nkomo would be more flexible on both economic and political guarantees. None of the black Africans would participate financially in any compensation schemes for white Rhodesians, but would not stand in the way of such guarantees if they were made by outside powers.

A failure in Geneva will spur renewed attempts to oust the Smith regime through force of arms. Any such effort will, of course, deeply involve the frontline presidents and present them with a host of problems.

The presidents will again be faced with the problem of imposing unity on a badly divided nationalist movement, many leaders of which could well have been discredited by the Geneva experience. Thus the presidents, at least Nyerere and Machel, are likely to encourage the development of a new leadership with the guerrilla

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movement, particularly from the "third force".

Machel will remain in the best position to influence the course of insurgency and his influence over its political orientation will likely be increased considerably. Machel, whose views were shaped by his long struggle against the Portuguese, believes that the Rhodesian struggle will be similarly prolonged and that the insurgency provides a period of tutelage during which the guerrillas will evolve into a disciplined force. Nyerere supports this view.

Kaunda, however, has little use for the third force or ZANU, which he considers leftist and tribalist. His support for Nkomo and ZAPU has been motivated in large part by fears of a radical ZANU-led, Mozambique-influenced regime next door, coupled with apprehension over the possibility of Cuba intervention supported by Moscow.

Although Kaunda will be dragged along in support of renewed insurgency, his consequences for Zambia of a prolonged war will keep him alert to any new opportunities for a negotiated settlement. The longer the war drags on, the more likely that Kaunda will look for opportunities to promote new talks to head off the consequences for Zambia and to salvage a role for the more moderate nationalist leaders he favors.

Botswana, despite its long common border with Rhodesia, has been much less involved in the insurgency than the other frontline states. President Khama meets regularly with his colleagues to

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bless joint policies, but he is fearful of deeper involvement for his country. He has allowed guerrillas to transit Botswana, largely because he is unable to prevent such movements he would probably continue to do so. Like Kaunda, Khama would be uncomfortable with a radical regime in Zimbabwe. He might thus support Kaunda in any new negotiating effort, but would not play an aggressive role and would tread carefully so as not to offend the hard liners.

In the event of a post-Geneva insurgency, Botswana could increase the economic pressure on Rhodesia by closing the border, but the effects of such a move would be manageable for Salisbury and almost catastrophic for Gaborone. Khama apparently has been under considerable pressure from Machel to increase his support for the insurgency and, if Geneva fails, he may have to accede. Khama would probably hope, however, to avoid major involvement until it was clear such involvement would be part of a final squeeze on the white Rhodesians, and that his involvement would not bring prompt Rhodesian retaliation.

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E. THE ROLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

Basic Attitudes and Policy toward Rhodesia

1. As long as the white regime in Rhodesia clings to power despite international sanctions, it will be largely dependent on South Africa for vital economic and military support. Although Prime Minister Vorster has ~~pushed~~ assumed a decisive role in pushing Ian Smith into resuming settlement talks with black nationalists on three occasions since late 1974, Vorster has never exerted South Africa's potentially compelling leverage to the extent that may be necessary to make Smith go through with an actual transfer of power to a predominantly black government. Whether Pretoria will maintain adequate pressure on the white Rhodesians throughout the projected two-year transition period depends primarily on Pretoria's week-by-week assessment of prospects for the emergence of a successor government that is both stable and willing to continue constructive relations with South Africa.
2. The critical decisions in Pretoria, however, will also be conditioned by the deeply ambivalent attitudes that South African whites have held toward the Smith regime ever since its Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. The Afrikaners as well as the English-speaking South Africans have a strong sense of solidarity with white Rhodesians, due to kinship ties and a long-held belief that a white-ruled Rhodesia is an important defense perimeter for white supremacy in South Africa.

Although government leaders in Pretoria recognized early

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on that the Rhodesian UDI involved serious risks for South Africa, most South African whites applauded the declaration. Now it is generally realized that the Rhodesian conflict is a menace to South Africa, yet Vorster feels compelled to avoid any action that would appear to be pushing white Rhodesians toward a "sellout" to the black nationalists.

3. The economic sanctions against Rhodesia that ensued from UDI have posed hard choices for government leaders in Pretoria. South Africans have substantial economic interests in Rhodesia, but more important, they regard the UN sanctions against Rhodesia as a dangerous precedent, because international critics of apartheid have long advocated mandatory sanctions against South Africa. Responsible South African leaders have feared that blatant participation in Rhodesian "sanctions busting" would spur new demands for mandatory sanctions against South Africa. Rhodesian appeals for military aid have struck responsive chords among South African whites, but government leaders have recognized that open South African assistance to Rhodesia would further inflame hostile attitudes throughout black Africa.
4. In the initial response to UDI, former prime minister Verwoerd declared "non-interference" and "business-as-usual" to be the principles governing South Africa's relations with Rhodesia; these watchwords have in fact marked the limits of subsequent South African actions.

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Smith regime and refrained from open economic or military aid. Nevertheless, South Africa has provided Rhodesia with substantial economic and military support, which has become increasingly vital for the Smith regime under the cumulative impact of sanctions and insurgency.

5. By mid-1974, when it became clear that the new government in Portugal would soon abandon its African colonies, Prime Minister Vorster perceived that Pretoria had to choose between openly propping up Smith or working toward coexistence with a black government in Mozambique. By the end of the year Vorster was discreetly pushing Smith toward a compromise settlement that, he hoped, would bring about an orderly transition to a moderate black government within five to ten years. As the four frontline presidents became involved in the Rhodesian negotiations, Vorster envisaged a Rhodesian settlement opening an era of collaboration between Pretoria and black governments throughout southern Africa. Since the collapse of negotiations between Smith and the ANC last year, Vorster has been more anxious than ever to head off an escalation of the Rhodesian guerrilla war that, he is convinced, would bring major accretions of Communist influence in Rhodesia and also in the frontline black states.

Economic and Military Aid

6. The most important single aspect of South African support for Rhodesia since UDI has been providing transit

for an increasing portion of Rhodesia's overseas trade. In 1973 some 70 percent of Rhodesia's overseas trade passed through seaports in Mozambique; since Mozambique closed its borders with Rhodesia last March, South African ports and railroads have handled almost all of Rhodesia's overseas trade. Much of the foreign capital invested in Rhodesia since UDI has come from South Africa, and South Africans have bought significant amounts of the Rhodesian exports that have been embargoed elsewhere. Meanwhile, the South African government has stood ostensibly aloof, neither enforcing international sanctions nor openly facilitating the manifold rearrange-
ments.

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7. Although South African military aid to Rhodesia has not been extensive, it has become critical with the recent expansion of foreign-backed insurgency. Salisbury depends heavily on Pretoria for military materiel because UN arms sanctions have been more widely observed than the ban on non-military trade.

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[redacted] It seems unlikely that the mounting tempo of Rhodesian counterinsurgency operations since last January could have been sustained without some increase in the flow of supplies from or through South Africa.

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Pretoria, however, has kept its military presence to the minimum that is essential to implement its ancillary support for the Rhodesian counterinsurgency program. The only major exception was the gradual buildup of the South African paramilitary police contingent in Rhodesia from several hundred in 1972 to at least 1,500 by late 1973. Although casualties incurred by this contingent made ^papparent its combat role, official publicity glossed over the extent of the buildup and implied the force was in Rhodesia primarily to gain realistic training.

Efforts at Negotiation

9. In late 1974 Vorster undertook joint mediation efforts, along with Kaunda, Khama, Machel, and Nyerere, that aimed to bring about a compromise settlement between Smith and the black nationalists. The joint efforts began with discreet exchanges of views between Vorster and Kaunda. It was Vorster's urging that induced Smith in October 1974 to

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Lusaka with Kaunda and the exiled insurgents, to conclude a truce with the newly formed ANC in December, and to proceed with the settlement talks with the combined ANC leadership that culminated in the abortive Victoria Falls conference in August 1975. The agreement on modalities that preceded the conference included a pledge that Pretoria, along with the governments of Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia, would guarantee any settlement that resulted from the conference. Vorster's leading role in the preliminary negotiations was further dramatized by his public meeting with Kaunda at Victoria Falls.

10. Vorster's prime lever throughout the joint mediation efforts was the gradual withdrawal of the South African police from Rhodesia. He warned Smith repeatedly that the withdrawal would proceed, even if he failed to conclude a settlement. Meanwhile, assurances from Pretoria that the withdrawal was proceeding induced the four African presidents to restrain guerrilla incursions from their countries. The withdrawal was completed in August 1975, shortly before the Victoria Falls conference.
11. Following the collapse of the Victoria Falls conference and the resurgence of guerrilla warfare, Vorster avoided any open move that would suggest he was pressuring Smith to resume settlement talks.

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The "Package Deal"

12. Vorster has maintained as low a profile as possible throughout the negotiations that culminated in Smith's announcement on September 24 that his government had accepted the "package deal" put to him by the U.S. Secretary of State. Vorster's overt meetings with Smith preceding the critical meeting between Smith and the Secretary prompted commentary that he must have pushed Smith toward capitulation. Vorster has insisted, however, that he merely hosted the critical meeting in response to appeals from both Smith and the Secretary. Vorster's latest protestations that his government has never used pressure tactics against the Smith regime show his sensitivity to accusations from right-wing elements in South Africa that he has "sold Rhodesia down the river." Hence it remains as unlikely as ever that Pretoria will assume the role of enforcing a final transfer of power to a black government in Rhodesia.
13. Nevertheless the "package deal," as announced by Smith, is so consistent with Vorster's concept of South Africa's vital interests that he is likely to do his utmost, within the bounds of South African politics, to bring about mutual acceptance and implementation of the Secretary's

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to date indicates that his primary concern is stopping the Rhodesian guerrilla war in order to head off accretions of Communist influence throughout the frontline states. His secondary interest is to set the stage, to the extent possible, for an orderly transition to a black Rhodesian government that will allow some scope for Western--especially South African--enterprise.

14. From Vorster's standpoint, the principal advantages of the "package deal" are as follows.

--Smith's acceptance of majority rule within two years complies with the basic criterion for international support of an interim government that has been stipulated by the British government and endorsed by the U.S.

--The interim government is to be formed immediately, by-passing the inevitably protracted process of drafting a constitution. As soon as it is established, international sanctions are to be lifted, and guerrilla warfare is to cease. Although none of the mediators can guarantee these results, the interlocking leverage of the U.S., Britain, and the frontline states could at least reverse the escalation of the war and largely nullify U.N. sanctions.

--The international trust fund would not only provide the wherewithal for healthy growth of an economy in which South Africans have substantial stakes, but would ^{also} exert a moderating influence on both the white settlers and the black nationalists.

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in the unfolding scenario, would be to link South Africa with the U.S., Britain, the frontline states, and a rehabilitated Rhodesia in a consortium that might be extended throughout southern Africa--the epitome of Pretoria's long-faltering "outward policy."

15. The specifics of the interim government, as stated by Smith, now appear to be the critical conflict points, where agreement between the ^bBlack nationalists and the white regime will be most difficult, and Vorster's influence on Smith could be decisive.

--The black nationalists especially fear that white ministers of defense and justice would maintain existing repressive measures against black nationalists.

--The white settlers fear that yielding control of the security services to hitherto feuding nationalist factions would result in anarchy.

--Smith, and many of his followers, may welcome an impasse over control of the two cabinet portfolios as an excuse to scuttle the "package deal."

--Vorster very likely believes that white control of the security services throughout the interim period is indispensable, to avoid the sudden lapses in physical security that would have adverse repercussions in the South African political arena. Also, he may hope that moderate black leaders will opt to retain expatriate officers in key positions to check tribal feuding in the security services.

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a truce agreement from foundering on this issue. Conceivably he might quietly press Smith to accept a face-saving compromise, such as black, getting the sensitive portfolios with an international guarantee that the white commanders would be retained for two years.

If a "Fight-Talk" Situation Drags On

16. It now seems less than likely that the London conference will soon produce an actual cessation of guerrilla warfare in Rhodesia. The frontline presidents have declared that they will continue to support armed struggle until Smith concedes interim arrangements that are acceptable to the black nationalists. If the African mediators decide that an early truce takes precedence over extracting significant concessions from Smith, at least some of ^{the} Rhodesian guerrillas are likely to reject the truce. The intransigents might then continue to get arms from Communist countries with tacit collaboration from at least one of the frontline presidents. In that event the white Rhodesians no doubt would appeal to South Africa for further military aid.
17. Such a situation would deepen the dilemma that has confronted Vorster since he undertook to mediate the Rhodesian conflict in 1974. Most South Africans would feel that Smith's acceptance of majority rule within two years makes the Rhodesian counterinsurgency program eligible for international support, at least until the black

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would be as anxious as ever to avoid the visible South African participation that would provoke the OAU to retaliatory action. In particular, sending troops to defend Smith would incur a high risk of hostilities with Mozambique, which would forfeit the important economic ties that Pretoria has carefully maintained since Machel came to power. Most important, Vorster would not willingly back Smith to the point of precluding an interim agreement that would provide Pretoria with an entree to collaborative relations with the U.S., Britain, and the frontline states.

18. In such a situation, however, Vorster very likely would find it politically impossible to impose a significant curtailment of military supplies to Rhodesia, comparable in impact to the withdrawal of South African police in 1975. The police buildup was a departure from the non-interference doctrine; when the withdrawal was completed, a South African spokesman said it was intended to avoid any suggestion of interference in Rhodesian affairs. By contrast, Rhodesia probably pays cash for South African military supplies; the Rhodesians would complain--and most South Africans would agree--that a cutoff of military sales would be a violation of the non-interference doctrine. Rather, if a buildup of foreign aid for the guerrillas were continuing, Vorster's only real option might be to make increases in ^{military} South aid contingent on Smith's acting in accordance with South Africa's basic interests.

19. Vorster, for instance, might insist that Smith proceed with a genuine transition to majority rule by forming an interim government with black participants who are as representative as possible under the circumstances. He might also insist that the Rhodesian armed forces desist from major strikes inside Mozambique, Zambia, or Botswana, in order to keep the door open for an international agreement to at least limit the escalation of guerrilla warfare. Such a strategy, however, would not long be tenable in the South African political arena unless Vorster's curbs on Smith are matched by comparable pressures on the black nationalists, exerted by the U.S., Britain, and the frontline states.

If Negotiations Fail

20. If the current negotiations collapse, leaving white Rhodesians no alternative except a surrender to militant nationalists or fighting to the bitter end, Vorster might still feel that South Africa should not back a hopeless struggle to the point of forfeiting the prospect of an eventual detente with Black Africa. Hence he might want to limit South African intervention to a brief rear-guard operation, to prevent massacre of white settlers and tip the course of the fighting toward whichever nationalist group appeared to be the lesser evil. Many South African whites, however, might conclude that the dead end of Rhodesian settlement talks proved the fallacy of the whole detente

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policy. Instead of waiting passively for a final pan-African onslaught, they would argue, it is better to fight the inevitable battles in Rhodesia or in Namibia, or even to launch a preemptive strike at Maputo.

21. In such an extremity, the usually pragmatic Vorster would be likely to sidestep doctrinal debate and focus on the practicalities, assessing proposed actions in terms of costs and resources. The costs of increasing military shipments to Rhodesia would sooner or later exceed Rhodesia's limited foreign exchange holdings and pose the issue of whether South Africa should assume the financial burden. Furthermore, South Africa cannot export large amounts of indigenously produced arms, equipment, and supplies without depleting reserve stocks for its own armed forces.
22. Deciding the affordable limits of South African military aid to Rhodesia would involve Pretoria in assessing a broad range of variables, from needed troop strengths in South Africa and Namibia to prospects for the South African economy, which is highly vulnerable to adverse international trends. If Vorster does feel it necessary to take a public stand against ^{for these} aid for Rhodesia, he might well rest his case on the persistence of serious rioting among South Africa's urban blacks since last June, and on the economic exigencies.
23. The rioting that has spread from Soweto to many black townships across the country is by far the most ex-

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tensive urban violence in South African history. So far the regular and paramilitary police have coped fairly effectively, and the military forces, with minor exceptions, have not been directly involved. Hence there is no immediate conflict between internal security needs and sending some combat troops to Rhodesia. On the other hand, South African whites are deeply worried over the extent of the rioting and the indications that militant students are trying--with some success--to involve blacks in work stoppages and other actions that could, if continued, cause serious industrial disruption. Although the rioting has spurred some public criticism of the government's performance, on balance we believe the sense of emergency would favor public acceptance of any curtailment of aid to Rhodesia that Vorster presents as essential for internal security.

24. Pretoria's need to conserve dwindling foreign exchange reserves may become the most persuasive reason--to South Africa--for curtailing military support whenever the Rhodesians are unable to pay for procurement or openly appeal for South African troops. South Africa's foreign exchange bind, due to falling gold prices and other international trends since early 1975, has been brought home to the public by appreciable currency devaluations, import controls, and increases in living costs. Even before the Soweto riots, commentators were warning that unemploy-

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ment among urban blacks was increasing at a rate that could fuel smoldering unrest. Government leaders have acknowledged that major increases in military expenditures since 1974 are a significant factor in the foreign exchange bind.